

Soviets Are Concerned About Security Of Their Nuclear Arms, Webster Says

By George Lardner Jr.
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CIA Director William Webster said yesterday that authorities in the Soviet Union are becoming less confident about keeping their nuclear weapons out of "unfriendly hands" as the country stands on the edge of dismemberment.

Webster said he did not think there was imminent danger, but he said Soviet officials have been taking steps to tighten controls over nuclear missiles, preparing to move them if necessary, and making sure an unauthorized launch cannot take place.

Speaking to reporters at a farewell press briefing, the outgoing CIA director said that Soviet officials in the past have had "a pretty high level of confidence" that their missile sites and the cryptographic systems for firing the missiles are secure.

Now, he said, "we see them paying attention to this in ways that would suggest they are not as confident . . . that everything can stay in place and nothing will present a threat." He did not elaborate.

U.S. intelligence, Webster said, will "have to pay a lot of attention to [this] as the central government loses its control on the ground in areas where different political views obtain, where there is more ethnic violence and rivalry, where those [missile] sites could become part of the process."

Last September, Gen. Mikhail Moiseyev, Soviet armed forces chief of staff, said some warheads had already been moved from troubled areas. The Soviet defense ministry subsequently insisted that no actual redeployment had taken place.

Webster, who announced his retirement earlier this month and is awaiting Senate confirmation of a successor, said Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's future is "increasingly uncertain" as he tries to stave off economic and political collapse.

After seeming to team up with conservative elements, Gorbachev in recent weeks has moved back toward reform and made overtures for direct economic aid from the West, pledging political and economic restructuring. But Webster said the Soviets still have "no clear game plan" to use the aid for lasting results rather than as temporary stopgaps.

"The question remains, is it too late for Gorbachev?" Webster said. "Moses didn't get to the Promised Land and this may be the case with Gorbachev."

The CIA director said Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Republic, and counterparts in other republics, may find it advantageous to back Gorbachev as head of a "federated type of government" for the time being while they pursue their own agendas. But Webster was pessimistic about the chances of keeping restive republics within the union.

On other topics, Webster said:

■ Investigators of the 1988 midair explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, have "a pretty good view" of who did it and how they did it, but are not quite ready to bring criminal charges. The suspects, according to informed sources, are Libyan, but among the issues still to be settled are whether charges should be brought here or in Scotland. Either way, Webster strongly indicated that the accusations will be limited

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to what can be established in a court of law and will be lodged against individuals, not countries.

"We have more than a circumstantial case," Webster said. "And it has been pieced together like a mosaic with sometimes new information changing views on the exact players and the manner in which they played."

■ Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is "currently very much in charge" of his country and bending all of his efforts to rebuild Iraq's shattered infrastructure—roads, bridges, electric utilities. The effort contrasts sharply with the situation in the Soviet Union, where up to 40 percent of food perishes on the way to market and individual republics have become so distrustful that they are unwilling to ship food from one to the other.

To keep the pressure on Saddam and prevent him from rearming, the United States and its allies must maintain economic sanctions, Webster said. As long as Iraq's two oil pipelines remain closed, he said, "that leverage continues."

While Saddam has made a few gestures towards sharing power with other Iraqis, "I wouldn't call them permanent and I wouldn't call them significant." Without continued, concerted pressure from coalition members, the CIA director said, Saddam will remain in power.

■ Drug production is increasing and countries the United States has been counting on, such as Colombia, have been flagging in their anti-drug efforts. Threats against judges in Colombia have intimidated the judiciary there. "If you cannot protect the judges," Webster said, "it's Katie bar the door."

According to official U.S. reports, production of material that can be refined into cocaine in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia in 1990 was between 700 and 890 metric tons, compared to 361 metric tons in 1988 and 695 in 1989.

■ President Bush and other officials accused by some of taking part in efforts in the fall of 1980 to delay release of U.S. hostages in Iran "ought not to be required to prove

negatives" just because some allegations have been made. Asked if he was convinced the allegations were untrue, Webster paused and said: "Well, I can't ask [late CIA Director William] Casey. And President Bush is very firm he had no part in it and I believe him."

■ International terrorism sponsored by Iraq "may be less likely in the near term" because Saddam may have "wisely" calculated that any such outbreaks would trigger reactions that would make it difficult for him to consolidate control of his country and complete its rehabilitation.

During the Persian Gulf War, Webster added, Syria played "a rather unilateral role" in restraining terrorists beholden to Damascus. But the biggest successes came from the cooperation of Western countries that used to deal with terrorism on a "don't bother us; we don't bother you" basis.

This time, by contrast, Webster said, "there were many, many cases of known terrorist teams" who were "trying to get someplace specific and they weren't allowed to."